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BOOK REVIEWS AND NOTICES.

I.

HISTORICAL RETROSPECTIONS.

THE third and concluding volume of the "Greville Memoirs"* covers a period so recent that to many it must seem almost like contemporaneous history, and yet in nothing does the flight of time appear more startling than in the reflected light which gleams from these pages. One feels a constant tendency to ask, "Can these things have taken place so long ago as to have become sober history?" The charm of Mr. Greville's writings lies in their genuine, Boswell-like simplicity. To the American reader there may seem to be surprisingly little about our country in these pages. It might be supposed that a man of observation and affairs, like Mr. Greville, would have found certain American events worthy of a place in his journals, in the remarkable epoch through which this country was then passing, and which must have furnished, one would think, subjects of occasional discussion in intelligent circles in Britain. The preliminary rumblings of our great national convulsion were making themselves heard. John Brown's raid had been described in every English newspaper. But the truth is that American affairs at that time were matters of little interest to the average English mind. They became of interest soon after the Greville journals closed. The only distinct reference to the United States we have discovered in this volume is on the question of Foreign Enlistment, when some American citizens were enlisted for service in the Crimea. Greville met Thackeray, who had just returned from his American tour, and describes him as saying that there was not an American who did not believe that if war ensued they could give England a good thrashing; upon which Greville remarks: "But in a country where the statesmen, if there are any, have so little influence, and where the national policy is subject to the passions and caprices of an ignorant and unreasoning mob, there is no security that good sense and moderation will prevail." At the same time he deplores even the remote prospect of what he calls a "suicidal contest between the two countries."

"Retrospections of America"† goes farther back. John Bernard was one of the first British actors to figure as a stage manager in the United States. The greater part of these retrospections are here published for the first time. The author had good opportunities for observing the state of society then existing, and he describes it very graphically. He seems to have been favorably impressed with

* "A Journal of the Reign of Queen Victoria. From 1852 to 1860." By the late Charles C. F. Greville, Esq., Clerk of the Council. Edited by Henry Reeve, Registrar of the Privy Council. D. Appleton & Company.

† "Retrospections of America, 1797-1811." By John Bernard, sometime secretary of the Beefsteak Club, etc. Harper and Brothers.

republican institutions, and stands up for them in his introductory chapter. He saw in America, even at that time, the arena of new principles, and even of manners and morality. "Thanks," he says, "to the spread of intelligence, French manners may be seen in loving alliance with English morality." He has many pleasant anecdotes and adventures which throw light on the social and domestic habits of his day, both Northern and Southern, and which are, therefore, of more than transient interest. The book should on this account, if no other, be in every historical library. We cannot refrain from quoting from a conversation the author had with Washington. Washington was giving utterance to some strong sentiments about liberty, when in walked a black negro carrying a pitcher of spring water, and the author says he could not repress a smile, which the general at once interpreted, and which furnished the occasion for the expression of his opinions about slavery. The mind of the slave, he thought, should first be educated to understand the obligations of freedom before the slave could profit by emancipation. He added, "Not only do I pray for it on the score of human dignity, but I can clearly see that nothing but the rooting out of slavery can perpetuate the existence of our Union, by consolidating it in a common bond of principle."

"*Recollections of a Private Soldier*"* brings us nearer our own day. This book is written from the standpoint of the rank and file. Without considering every opinion expressed—that, for example, as to the policy of calling for volunteers to suppress the rebellion, instead of at the outset drawing soldiers ratably and by lot, which the author thinks should have been done—it may be said that his book is exceedingly valuable in many respects. It is certainly interesting and thoroughly readable. It gives a better idea of the reality of a soldier's life than many of the more pretentious histories of the War. When the author enlisted the Rebellion was at its height, and the first flush of excitement in volunteering was over. He speedily found himself among eight hundred or a thousand ruffians, most of them bounty-jumpers, who were guarded by heavy lines of sentinels, and were almost to a man cowards and bullies. His description of his life among these wretches until he found himself in camp gives a vivid picture of unrelieved misery. And there is a good deal about camp life and drill which comes in for criticism, though not in a spirit of mere fault-finding. The story of Grant's last campaign is graphically told. The impression had got abroad in the ranks that Grant was a fighting general, and veterans shrugged their shoulders and said: "He can find all the fighting he wants." The author states that the soldiers of the Potomac had the highest opinion of Lee and his army, and recognized the fact that it required the best kind of generalship to overmatch them. Human life was sacrificed in a constant and fruitless endeavor to drive the army of Virginia from their defenses. The author states that on one occasion, at the battle of Cold Harbor, after a terrible repulse accompanied with immense loss of life, the order to charge was again given but not a man obeyed it. "The army to a man refused to obey the order, presumably from General Grant, to renew the assault. I heard the order given, and I saw it disobeyed." Many of the enlisted men had been up to and over the Confederate works. They had seen their strength and they knew they could not be carried by direct assault and they refused to make a second attempt. Again, when before Petersburg, the author heard some veteran soldiers thus describe a charge: "We are going to run toward the Confederate earthworks and then we are going to run back. We have had enough of assault-

* "*Recollections of a Private Soldier in the Army of the Potomac.*" By Frank Wilkeson. G. P. Putnam's Sons.

ing earthworks. We are hungry and tired, and we want to rest and eat." He states that in the latter part of June, 1864, it was freely charged by the generals in the Army of the Potomac that the army was not fighting as stanchly at Petersburg as it had fought in the Wilderness or at Spottsylvania. He believes that the charge was true, and was explainable by the demoralization of the army, owing in part to its loss of confidence in the generalship which hurled it unavailingly against impregnable earthworks, and in part to the wretched character of the raw recruits sent to fill up its broken ranks. The general opinion was that if Grant had had command of the army in 1862 the rebellion would have been crushed that year. With regard to McClellan, he states that while personally liked by his soldiers, they did not, as a rule, concede to him great aggressive military talent.

Our author did not follow Grant to his final victory. Having been offered a commission some time previously, he at length decided to claim his discharge, and subsequently rejoined the army as a lieutenant in the Fourth Artillery, and served with his regiment before Washington and elsewhere.

It is quite natural that widely different estimates should be formed of the men who rose to eminence during our civil war; but to select five such characters, and, without reference to the services of other men, to eulogize these five as the men who saved the Union, as Mr. Donn Piatt does,* is to invite the suggestion, not simply of hero-worship, but of idolatry. Nevertheless, his volume is exceedingly interesting. And the men here portrayed undoubtedly stand in the central group of heroes and councillors who earned immortal honor as saviours of their country. But they were not the only men worthy to be so designated. Lincoln, Stanton, Chase, Seward, and Thomas were mighty men, and their names will live; but to ignore the part which other brave and prominent chiefs bore in the great ordeal of the nation, is to ignore the facts of history. It is, for instance, commonly supposed that General Grant and General Sherman had something to do in saving the Union. Mr. Piatt not only refuses to admit General Grant into his galaxy of heroes, but takes special pains to belittle him. Whenever Grant or Sherman is spoken of in this book it is in tones of depreciation approaching contempt. McClellan, of course, is consigned to the incapables. In Mr. Piatt's view, General Thomas was the one soldier-general who saved the Union, and, in admiration of his hero, our author sees none else. The best thing he has to say of General Grant is that he was a brave man, and would fight, but his success is regarded as purely adventitious, and in no sense the result of high military qualities. Of course, this is no place for discussing that question. But to ignore Grant in any memories of this kind is to place one's self at once on the defensive, since, rightly or wrongly, the country persists in regarding him as the central hero of the war. But in spite of his prejudices, Donn Piatt's work is always brilliant and captivating. In his present book Lincoln stands before us in all his homeliness and in all his grandeur, the man of the hour, to whom the preservation of the Union was the one great object to which every other question, including slavery, was secondary. Stanton, Chase, and Seward appear natural and life-like on the canvas, each filling his peculiar sphere and each indispensable, the first two occupied with the heavy responsibilities of domestic administration, and the last managing with infinite tact the nation's difficult foreign affairs. Speaking of the statue of Seward in Union Square, New York, the author justly says: "For four years nothing stood between that great commercial centre and the utter ruin of a bombardment but the subtle intellect and patriotic heart of that one man. Without a navy, possessed of no coast defenses, our cities on the sea were at the mercy of the weakest naval power in Europe."

*"Memories of the Men who Saved the Union." By Donn Piatt. Belford, Clarke & Co.
VOL. CXLV.—NO. 370.

Of General Thomas, whose sketch is the longest, the American people are well proud, and it may possibly be true that his not coming to the front as Commander-in-Chief was a national calamity. General Sherman, in a recent article in these pages, has marked his high opinion of the soldierly qualities of Thomas. But it certainly appears to be too late to convince the American people that he, and he alone, of all the generals of the war, is worthy of a niche in the monument erected to the saviours of the Union.

II.

DOUBT, NEGATION, FAITH.

THE interest excited by Count Tolstoi's book, "*My Religion*," will naturally find many readers for the "*Confessions*." In this book, which really preceded the other in the order of composition, the author lays bare his individual life, shows what his early training was, how he drifted into the current of fashionable folly and wickedness, and the mental processes by which he emerged from an easy-going skepticism to a tranquil and assured faith. What this faith is, and how related to the life of man and the teachings of Christ, also form a part of this interesting memoir. There is evident, throughout, deep earnestness of spirit, a knowledge of books and men, the power of philosophic abstraction, and a profound conviction on the part of the author that he has reached the conclusion of the whole matter. The thoughtful reader will find himself carried along without effort over roads often traversed,—through labyrinths of questions which have baffled wise men all the ages,—until at length he reaches the goal, which in this case is the restful faith which gives satisfaction and peace to the author. Probably the majority of readers will be unable to accept the views of life here put forward as a whole. There is a touch of mysticism and, perhaps, of fanaticism in the Count's theology, but not enough to spoil the book. The author breaks clear away from ecclesiastical moorings, but instead of landing in infidelity or mere negation, finds refuge in a fervid spirituality, in the atmosphere of which worldly and sensuous things fade and melt away. In many particulars this Confession and the added synopsis of Christ's teachings are remarkably suggestive.

The author sees a good illustration of life in "an old Eastern fable about a traveler in the steppes who is attacked by a furious wild beast. To save himself the traveler gets into a dried up well; but at the bottom of it he sees a dragon with its mouth wide open to devour him. The unhappy man dares not get out for fear of the wild beast, and dares not descend for fear of the dragon, so he catches hold of the branch of a wild plant growing in a crevice of the well. His arms grow tired and he feels that he must soon perish, death awaiting him on either side, but he still holds on; and then he sees two mice, one black and one white, gnawing through the trunk of the wild plant. As they gradually and evenly make their way around it, the plant must soon give way, break off, and he will fall into the jaws of the dragon. The traveler sees this and knows that he must inevitably perish; but, while still hanging, he looks around him, and, finding some drops of honey on the leaves of the wild plant, he stretches out his tongue and licks them." "Thus, says Tolstoi, do I cling to the branch of life, knowing that the dragon of death inevitably awaits me, ready to tear me to pieces, and I cannot understand why such tortures have fallen to my lot. I also strive to suck the honey which once comforted me, but it palls on my palate, while the white mouse and the black, day and night gnaw through the branch to which I cling."

* "*My Confession and the Spirit of Christ's Teaching*." By Count Lyof N. Tolstoi. Translated. T. Y. Crowell & Co.